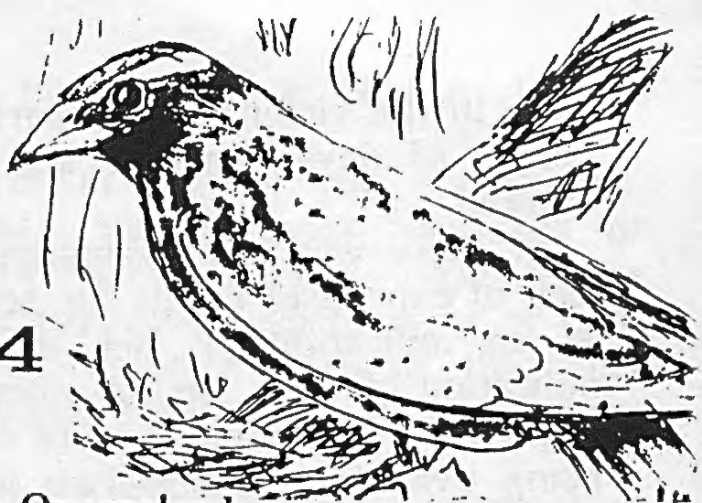


# CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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## Birding in Southern Queensland

After three years I returned to the Sunshine Coast (100kms north of Brisbane), and the Darling Downes, just south of Dalby.

At the Sunshine Coast I was staggered by the land clearance and development. Gone were the tidal creeks and bushland where I had birded before - now very up-market mansions along the spotless waterways, and concrete banks bordered by manicured lawns. No wonder the Rainbow Bee-eaters were going around in circles.

Clearing is still going on of course, and while I was there bulldozers were working around one lone, tall, dead tree on which Ospreys were nesting. The developers had agreed to let it stand until the chicks had flown. White-faced Herons were common on front lawns and roof tops, and one day I had a wonderful sighting of a Pacific Bazza on a roof.

Other birds seen "on the edge" were, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaley-breasted Lorikeet, Brown, Blue-faced, Striped, Yellow-faced and Lewins Honeyeaters, Noisy Friar-bird, Little Friar-bird, Spangled Drongo, Fig Bird, Dollar Bird, and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo.

The Darling Downs are depressing sight - mile after mile of ploughed paddocks blowing away in the wind.

The Condamine River was not flowing, but there were water holes of some length., and a quiet row was rewarding - flocks of Plum-headed Finches, two Rufous Night-herons, a male Common Koel (pushed west?), and a long time resident Pheasant Coucal.

The banks must be just ideal for goannas to breed - we saw eight adults, up to 1½ metres long and countless young ones. As the river dries up, where will they go?

Sadly, the drought made the homeward trip through N.S.W. utterly depressing for someone brought up on a farm in this type of country.

M.O.

## Anglesea Camp

During October I was fortunate to be one of the participants in the first Victorian Field Naturalist Skills Workshop. The Workshop ran for nine days (and nights) and was held at the Anglesea Recreation Camp. The program was full, and included a trip to Deakin University where we were able to examine our collected specimens in the laboratory.

Much of the organization for the workshop was carried out by members of the Geelong Field Naturalists Club and Angair. Registrations

were in the vicinity of 85 participants, with some people attending for a couple of days, leaving, and then returning when other commitments allowed.

If there was any disappointing feature for me (apart from my own lack of expertise) it was the scarcity of young people. I did not take this as an indication of lack of interest of younger people, but as an indication of their having other commitments. I would estimate that the majority of participants were over the age of 60 with two of the women being over 80. These two were highly dedicated and in spite of the appearance of physical frailty, they kept up with (and on occasions, lead) the rest of us.

The first weekend was mainly taken up with lectures, followed by a couple of tentative forays into the field (the softening up process, I believe).

Geoff Carr, a consultant botanist spoke on plant identification. He emphasized the importance of the interaction between different species of plants, and plant/animal interaction. He also introduced the uninitiated, like me, to concepts such as "quadrats" and "transects" which are plots used to measure the level and diversity of plant cover in the bush. These plots can be used on a one-off basis, or they can be assessed at regular intervals to establish which plants are present in particular seasons, or they could be used on a longitudinal study to assess changes in species present.

Geoff also introduced to us cover abundance scales for recording quadrat data. Two scales are used, the Modified Braun-Blanquet scale and the Domin-Krajina scale. The latter has 11 divisions ranging from solitary species with insignificant cover to any number with complete cover. For the purpose of our exercises the simpler Braun-Blanquet scale with six divisions was used. Geoff later took us out into the field to demonstrate how to set up quadrats and transects.

Neil Archbold, a lecturer and research geologist, admitted at the outset of his lecture that he intended to be provocative. He did not disappoint us. He stressed that the earth, as a living planet, is constantly evolving. It does NOT experience cycles, as it never returns to a former state. In order for new life to evolve, other life must be destroyed! He said that we must consider that although Australia has the oldest rocks, it is the "youngest" continent, having "recently" split off from Antarctica. He warned against holding a "homocentric" view of the world. He stated that southern Australia had a naturally eroding coastline and that we should not be too worried about this so long as we do not expedite the process by abuse. A later walk along the beach with Neil provided a practical demonstration to match his words of wisdom.

On the first Saturday evening John Landy was the after dinner speaker. He showed a set of beautiful slides, some of which were used to illustrate his book "A Coastal Diary", and spoke of his experiences when gathering material for his book, and of the importance of

environmental conservation. (He was not present at Neil Archbold's Lecture.)

Participants were requested to enrol in one of the six groups, selecting a habitat - heathy woodland, coastal dunes, wetlands or ironbark forest - or to join one of the two survey parties - mammals or birds. The program was set up so that participants spent most of their time in their chosen habitat, with one session in each of the other habitats. We were also encouraged to spend some time with each of the survey parties.

Monday morning was devoted to the Rufous Bristle-bird hunt in which most people participated. Unfortunately no one had advised the birds that they were being sought, so they remained relatively scarce with few sightings, although some people were able to detect their presence by their calls. This fairly uninspiring looking bird is mainly confined to areas of coastal heathland, extending west from Anglesea to the mouth of the Murray. It was feared that, if the bird was not wiped out in the 1983 bushfires, its numbers were severely depleted. However, it appears that its numbers are now on the increase, which is somewhat surprising, given its almost suicidal habit of walking, rather than flying, across roads. It nests in low scrub, which was relatively safe before the introduction of feral animals of prey.

My days were spent in the heathy woodlands, which was the most popular habitat, so our group was divided into two. Like dedicated Nats, we were on site soon after 9 a.m., taking packed lunches with us. Our group set out to determine whether an old pine plantation planted in the 1930's and abandoned some years later had affected the botanical diversity of the area. The plantation was located in part of the Alcoa lease.

The site we chose was along an unsealed road. On one side of the road there was evidence of pines having been planted. We set up eight separate random quadrats on each side of the road. We also set up a belt transect of 15 quadrats which went deeper into the pine plantation. The results indicated that botanical diversity on the non-plantation side of the road was greater by approximately a third the number of species on the plantation side. Most evenings were spent collating and analysing data.

On the second Saturday each group presented its findings in "draft form". Full written reports will be supplied later. Presentations varied between the full lecture style and the carefully choreographed dramatic approach with each member of the team providing the cue to hand over to the next member. Whilst the latter form was by far the most entertaining it will also be the most difficult to convert into a formal report.

Deakin University was our destination on the final Friday evening when we were able to examine some of our collected "treasures" under the microscope. What a world the microscope opened up, where the

seemingly simple is revealed in all its complexity.

John Aberton, a research fellow at Deakin showed slides of some of his finds in his mammal traps, including one unexpected brown snake. Scott Laidlaw, a Deakin Ph.D. student discussed the dreaded cinnamon fungus and its effect on the mammal population. The Anglesea area has been badly affected by the fungus to which species such as *Banksia marginata* and *Xanthorhoea australis* are particularly prone.

If there was one thing I quickly learned at the comprehensive camp it was how little I knew! On the first day in the field I wondered what were the little silver gadgets most people had hanging around their necks. My sixth sense told me that although they looked like old-fashioned postmen's whistles they probably were not. Once I saw them in operation I made a resolution to add a hand lens to my urgent shopping list. By the end of the camp I had names like *Platylobium obtusangulum* and *Gompholobium ecostatum* rolling off my tongue like a veteran.

Did I enjoy myself, and would I go again? Just let me know when the next one is on.

Natalie de Maccus.

### Annual Meeting

#### *Elections*

February 10, 1995

at Continuing Education, Templeton Street

at 8pm

Extra nomination forms can be obtained from E. Perkins or from Noellene at Tonks Bros.

Nominations close on

Friday Feb.3

Leave nomination forms with the Secretary at 4 Thomas Street, or at Tonks Bros.

### Sandon Birds, October

Australasian Grebe  
Pacific Black Duck  
Little Eagle  
Brown Falcon  
Common Bronzewing  
Galah  
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo  
Crimson Rosella  
Eastern Rosella  
Red-rumped Parrot  
Pallid Cuckoo  
Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo  
Shining Bronze-cuckoo

Kookaburra  
Welcome Swallow  
Richard's Pipit  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
Blackbird  
Scarlet Robin  
Eastern Yellow Robin  
Jacky Winter  
Crested Shrike-tit  
Rufous Whistler  
Grey Shrike-thrush  
Restless Flycatcher  
Grey Fantail

Willie Wagtail  
Superb Blue Wren  
Speckled Warbler  
Weebill  
Brown,  
Buff-rumped,  
Yellow-rumped,  
Yellow and  
Striated Thornbills  
White-throated Treecreeper  
Red Wattlebird  
Yellow-faced,  
White-eared,  
Yellow-tufted,

Brown-headed and  
White-naped Honeyeaters,  
Mistletoebird  
Spotted Pardalote  
Striated Pardalote  
Silvereye  
Red-browed Firetail  
Diamond Firetail  
Olive-backed Oriole  
White-winged Chough  
Dusky Woodswallow  
Magpie  
Grey Currawong  
Australian Raven  
Susanna Starr

### A Little Bit of Good News!

*From "The New Plantsman" R.H.S. publication Vol 1 1994 -*

Sir Simon Hornby, President R.H.S. in the Introduction noted

"It is welcome news that decisions made at the most recent International Botanical Congress will result in the conservation of many more species' names and thus, fewer future changes."

### Observations for October

\*Black-shouldered Kites feeding around the town, M.W. B.M.; in Taradale, A. von G.; at Harcourt, also a White-faced Heron taken up residence. B.E.

\*Shining Bronze-Cuckoo seen at Gaulton St, M.O., and Campbell St., K.T..

\*A flock of about 20 Maned Geese spending more and more time in the paddock opposite at North Castlemaine as things get drier. The dam still has plenty of water. R.M.

\*A Koala and an Echidna seen on a walk at Spring Hill. K.M.

\*A koala seen on the Newstead/Sandon road. S.S.

\*White Cockatoos, Crimson Rosellas, Pied and Grey Currawongs, Galahs, Magpies and a lone Major Mitchell Cockatoo are being fed on seed, oatmeal and bread on a specially built bird table at Spring Hill. They come down when called, but the others sit back and wait for the White Cockies to finish first, and then all take their turn. K.M.

\*Curtises now have 2 pairs of galahs making hollows in trees on their property and another pair is making a new hollow at 118 Blakeley Rd. All birds have chosen Yellow Gums. R.M.

\*Nine Wedgetails were seen circling by the Kyneton walking group on their way to Halls Gap. The second car-load following a bit further back saw them too, and were nearly hit by a rabbit which came hurtling out of the sky! K.M.

\*An eagle's nest has been reported from Mount Tarrengower, M.O., and another one at the back of Newstead, K.T.

\*A Goshawk's nest and a Wedgetail's nest with the bird sitting on the nest on the Muckleford excursion with Ballarat. E.P.

\*Prostrate Hop-Bush and a sitting male White-browed Woodswallow on the excursion with Maryborough on the Peacock Track, Amherst. R.M.

\*A nest in a small bush was seen on the FNC/U3A outing at North Harcourt. It contained an egg and two still naked nestlings. S.B.

\*Zitting Cisticolas at Little Hampton. One was sitting on a fence "zitting" and the other, unseen, was answering with a "twit". S.B.

\*Restless Flycatcher now been seen in Elizabeth St., Winters Flat. S.P.

\*A recent walk along the Mistletoe Mine track at Tipperary Springs, Daylesford, revealed that there has been very little in the way of re-generation from the autumn fuel reduction burn - probably because of the dry season. Common Bird Orchid plants were abundant, but with very few buds or flowers. The Grevillea repens has survived, but is not looking very healthy. S.P.

\*Large flocks of Woodswallows noticed passing overhead late October. Robert had time to observe them perched and saw three varieties - mostly Dusky with some White-browed and possibly Masked. S.S.

\*Mother ringtailed Possum with young in horizontal log box. Unwelcome wallaby sighted on our land! S.S.

#### November bird List for 61 Hunter Street.

Eastern Rosellas

Crimson Rosellas

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos

Blackbirds with young

Goldfinches

Red Wattlebirds with young

Striated Thornbills

Yellow-faced Honeyeaters

Common Bronzewing feeding under wattle tree

Two sightings of a Black-shouldered Kite.

Starling and sparrow families with the reckless juveniles making erratic low level flights around the garden to the delight and satisfaction of my neighbour's cat!

Galahs

Ravens

Magpies

Grey Fantail

Rufous Whistler

Blue Wrens

Silvereyes

Mistletoebirds

S. Parnaby

#### Notes from the Norwoods at Fryerstown

Last Monday we started off down the track on our usual walk. We rarely take field glasses these days as we "never" see any new birds and recognise all the familiar species without any aid. Besides, good brisk cardio-pulmonary exercise seems more of an imperative!

Half a kilometre from home we noticed the sky seemed full of birds we could not recognise though they looked like some sort of swallows from their flight patterns and shape, but were too big for martins.

Dusky Woodswallows are now regular occupants in the spring but never in these numbers. I gave my heart and lungs an expected workout by running the half kilometre home and back in record time to collect the field glasses and was delighted to see these birds at closer range, settling in the tree tops, seemingly attracted to the flowering grey box. They had deep orange-pink breasts and marked white eye-brows and the characteristic grey of the Dusky Woodswallows, but these were White-browed Woodswallows and there were at least one hundred of them. Since then we have seen them every evening and they have come down to the ground and to the dam to drink. They seem to be settling in.

Chris came back to rescue the dinner that evening and I went on to pick up some eggs from our local supplier,. On the way back I noticed a strange looking, slightly New Holland-like honeyeater eyeing me off from a short distance. What I noticed was its "mottled" breast and its eye ring, as well as its "New Holland" back. I couldn't believe it could be a Regent Honeyeater when I checked in Slater at home, as its eye was not as bald as the picture in Slater. But in the Readers Digest book the eye has more of an orange ring than a large orange patch around it and the chance of it being a Regent Honeyeater seemed probable. Next morning, determined to seek it out again, but nearly giving up after a fruitless half-hour, I suddenly saw it on a low branch in front of me. I couldn't believe I was looking at what was undoubtedly a Regent Honeyeater. I rushed home again and got Chris to come too. We found not the rather lost looking bird, but a pair of them feeding a young bird that was already quite sizable and had definite black and yellow markings (that is, it wasn't a young cuckoo!)

Our Painted Honeyeaters are now familiar spring occupants and call regularly all day long with their characteristic "Georgie" call. I have noticed that it rises in pitch to "Peggie" when we are close to the nest. Also to our delight the Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters are increasing in numbers, but this year there seems to be less White-naped.

We also had a colony of young Eastern Bent-wing Bats and a young snake about 14" long. It looked like a brown snake but had a black band across its head. It escaped like Houdini from a jar with a lid that had a rock on it before we could definitely identify it. Does anyone know if young Brown Snakes have black head bands? or could it have been a Copperhead?

Clodagh Norwood.

Vale Tom Stitt. One of our former members, Tom Stitt, died suddenly a few weeks ago., He was very active in the Daylesford Shire roadside survey, and a number of vegetation projects in Daylesford.

Disclaimer - Authors are responsible for the accuracy of information they use, and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.

## CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street.

Sat Dec 3 Maldon Roadsides, Maldon Landcare Group with Roadside Conservation Committee and E. Perkins. C.F.N.C. members are invited. Meet at Maldon Hall at 9.15 am. Includes a bus trip. Further details from E. Perkins.

Fri Dec 9 Members and Visitors Night. Members are asked to provide a short segment for the program, possibly some slides, or a short talk or demonstration., Darryl Glover (C&N.R. Ranger at Castlemaine) will give a short talk, "Strategies for Fauna and Flora Conservation in Bushland Reserves". A plate of supper, too, please. Continuing Education at 8 pm.

Sat Dec 10 Wombat Forest See at first hand the logging operations, and revegetation. Leaders are Chris Morris, and Monty Kirby, a member of the Wombat Forest Society. Leave CHIRP at 1.30pm or meet at Daylesford P.O. at 2 pm.

Thurs Dec 15 CFNC/U3A birdwatching. Meet at Cont. Ed. car park at 9.30 am. Leader E. Perkins.

Thurs Jan 26 \* Dawn Birds Seen the sun rise and the birds at dawn, then enjoy an early breakfast together. Meet at 15 Gaulton St. Sharp. Leader, M. Oliver.

\*Note changed date.

Thurs Jan 26 Business Meeting 7.30pm at 26 Campbell St.

Friday Feb 10 Annual Meeting. Speaker, Bill Holsworth, Bendigo F.N.C. Bats of Central Victoria. Further details inside.

Sat. Feb. 11 Birds and Pondlife, Barkers Creek Res., N. Harcourt.

Thurs Feb 16 CFNC/U3A birdwatching.

Friday March 10 to Monday March 13. VFNCA and WVFNCA combined Campout at Portland. Venue, Karnkendi Conference Centre, Wade St, Nelson. Details and registration forms at General Meeting

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Committee: B. Maund (Pres.), B. Envall (V.P.), M. Willis (Sec.), G. Broadway (Treas.), K. Turner (Prog.), R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, M. Oliver, S. Parnaby, C. Morris, K. Meehan, M. Hunter, and S. Bruton.

### Meetings:-

**General** - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Continuing Education, Templeton St. at 8 pm.

**Business** - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

**Subscriptions** - Ordinary Membership: Single \$14, Family \$20

Pensioner/Student: Single \$10, Family \$16. Supporting: \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.  
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.